

# ON THE VALUE AND NATURE OF TRUTH

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Sometimes we are confronted by a thought that is at the same time both obvious and difficult to explicate in a precise and vindicating way. The thought that truth is valuable for its own sake (“the target thought”) is a thought of this kind. In this paper, I try to explicate and vindicate the target thought by arguing, in a sense to be clarified in the paper, that truth is an epistemic value. Though I am in sharp disagreement with his conclusions, I am aided in this endeavor by some recent work of Paul Horwich’s (2006) that provides an assemblage of questions, suggestions, and arguments on how to explicate and vindicate the target thought.<sup>1</sup> After (I) some terminological preliminaries, I (II) consider and criticize Horwich’s way of explicating and vindicating the target thought, (III) present an intriguing paradox against the idea that truth is an epistemic value that Horwich outlines in support of his own view, (IV) criticize Horwich’s way of coming to terms with the paradox, (V) sketch my own solution to the paradox in which truth *is* an epistemic value, and finally, (VI) conclude with a discussion of the bearing of the issues on deflationary accounts of the nature of truth.

## I

What is wanted is an explication and vindication of the thought *that truth is valuable for its own sake*. Following Horwich, I approach the issue by considering the question of whether VT is true:

VT            It is desirable to believe what is true and only what is true

If VT is true, I will say *truth is a value*. When the question of what kind of value truth is comes up, I will say *truth has* [some kind of] *value*. If truth has or does not have some kind of value fundamentally or importantly, I will say *truth is* or *is not a* [that kind of] *value*.

I will be concerned with the question of whether truth is *a merely instrumental, a moral, or an epistemic value*. The paper assumes that moral and epistemic values are valuable for their own sake, so if truth can be shown to be one or the other, then the target thought will have been vindicated. The focus is on understanding what kind of value truth is, if indeed it is a value. Finally, although Horwich does not use the phrase ‘epistemic value’, I hope to make it plausible that it designates a genuine and fundamental category in Horwich’s discussion and, in at least one important sense, in the realm of value.

## II

Horwich’s paper is really more of an assemblage of ideas than a direct argument. One can nevertheless make out that Horwich’s overall aim is to explicate and vindicate the target thought in way consistent with a deflationary attitude to truth. Horwich first aims to show that truth is a moral value, and then to show how this understanding of truth does not

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<sup>1</sup> All unaccompanied section references are to (the short sections of) this paper.

compromise a deflationary account of the nature of truth. I take up the connection to deflationary accounts of truth in VI below.

Horwich does not say much by way of positive justification for his thesis that truth is a moral value. Early on in his paper, Horwich takes it as evident that truth is a value, and then asks what kind of value it is by asking “*why* truth is worth bothering with?” (§5).<sup>2</sup> Horwich notes that truth is certainly an *instrumental* value, in the sense that true belief facilitates the satisfaction of desire. But it is important for Horwich that this does not exhaust the value of truth; this view does not explicate the target thought but instead assigns value to truth for the sake of the value of satisfying desire. By contrast, for Horwich true belief has “non-instrumental value – a value for its own sake” (§6). But, Horwich asks, “what do we mean when we say that truth is ‘valuable for its own sake?’” (§6), and in response he says, “[a] plausible answer is that we have in mind a *moral* value. —We think that someone who seeks knowledge and understanding for their own sake displays a moral virtue” (§6). Truth is not just an instrumental value, but also a moral value, displayed in seeking knowledge and understanding for their own sake.

I don’t think that this is intended to be anything more than a rough proposal for a potential direction of exploration. Horwich suggests that we can bolster this rough proposal by noting a parallel between how our judgments of the correctness of certain moral norms can be explained and how our judgment of the target thought can be explained. According to Horwich, we judge moral norms that dictate attitudes or sentiments of consideration for others and benevolence to be correct because of the “beneficial self-centered effects” consideration and benevolence produce (§6). Let’s grant that. Horwich’s idea is that, “as in the case of values that are uncontroversially moral”, it is plausible that we judge the target thought to be true because of the already-noted and uncontroversial instrumental value of true belief, including for the beneficial self-centered effects of true belief.<sup>3</sup>

But this will show truth to be a moral value only if the following principle is true:

(MV) if X is judged to be of value for its own sake because of the beneficial effects that valuing it produces, then X is a moral value

But it is not at all clear that this principle is true. Maybe we judge that reasoning in accordance with Modus Ponens or induction is of value for its own sake because of the beneficial effects that valuing such reasoning produces; but that would not seem to make reasoning in accordance with Modus Ponens or induction a moral value. More generally: the fact that a certain explanatory structure holds for our judgment of the target thought will not

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<sup>2</sup> That is, Horwich pretty much takes it for granted that VT is true. He considers an objection to one part of it, the idea that we should believe all truths, but deflects it by saying that truth is just one of our values amongst others, one that can be outweighed by others. But once that objection has been deflected, Horwich assumes, quite early in the paper, that truth is a value (“So I’m going to assume for the rest of this discussion that both parts of VT are correct” (§3)).

<sup>3</sup> It should be remarked that there is no inconsistency in the idea that we can explain *judgments* of value in terms of the beneficial effects engendered by so judging *without* holding that the *correctness of those values* is, or is even to be explained in terms of, the beneficial effects of so judging. Indeed, we might “esteem” certain “complications of mental qualities” as Hume says, because of, broadly speaking, the beneficial effects they produce, even though the moral values that recommend these mental qualities are a kind of projective illusion. On the other side, Horwich thinks that the correctness of certain values may be explanatorily fundamental (Horwich 2005: 169-170), even though our *judgments* to the effect that these values are correct can be explained in terms of the beneficial effects of so valuing.

show that truth is a moral value unless that explanatory structure holds *only* “in the case of values that are uncontroversially moral”. But showing that the explanatory structure holds for moral values like consideration and benevolence does not show that it holds only for “values that are uncontroversially moral”. The example above, not to mention the case of truth itself, suggest that this is implausible, and that that kind of explanatory structure can hold for other kinds of values.

I do not want to dwell on the shortcomings of Horwich’s positive justification for the thought that truth is a moral value. This is not because that thought and the ideas that surround it are unimportant for this paper. As we shall see, the thought that truth is something like a moral value (if it is a value at all) is fundamental in the connection to deflationary accounts of the nature of truth. We will also be returning in the next section to the idea of what it means to seek knowledge and understanding for their own sake. But these ideas are best approached *not* by thinking about Horwich’s positive justification for the thought that truth is a moral value, but by thinking about his opposition to an alternative view about the kind of value truth is. In fact, I doubt that Horwich intends to argue seriously for the positive thesis that truth is a moral value. What is fundamental to Horwich’s paper is a certain negative contention – his argument *against* explicating and vindicating truth as an epistemic value.

### III

‘Epistemic value’ is not, as I said, an expression that Horwich uses. But my use of it provides an instructive label for the issues under discussion when (in §§7, 8) Horwich argues against the intuitive idea that norms of justification are deployed out of a concern for the value of truth. Horwich writes:

The norms that we deploy in the appraisal of beliefs include more than VT. We feel, in addition, that one ought to reason in accord with induction...that one ought to accept instances of ‘p or not p’, that one ought not have obviously contradictory beliefs, that one should accept inferences from “p” to “It is true that p”, that one should be led by certain visual experiences to believe that something red is present, etc. But although such norms of justification (warrant, entitlement, etc.) are distinct from VT, they are intuitively related to it. It is natural to think that we deploy them for the sake of VT—i.e. that our end is to have beliefs that are true, and that our means to that end is to follow certain rules for when beliefs of various kinds are to be acquired and retained... But, as initially compelling as this view of the matter might be, it cannot be right. (§7)

Horwich argues that we can neither rationalize our deployment nor explain the correctness of our norms of justification by an appeal to the value of truth.<sup>4</sup> Horwich takes his arguments on this matter to produce a conclusion sufficiently counterintuitive so as to constitute a kind of paradox – his *paradox of truth and epistemic value*, as I’ll call it. Horwich accepts the paradoxical conclusion of his reasoning and denies the intuitive idea that our

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<sup>4</sup> Horwich seems to think that nothing explains the correctness of correct norms or values – they are explanatorily fundamental (Horwich 2005: 169-170). For this reason, I think, Horwich’s discussion focus on the issue of rationalization much more than the issue of explanation. I’ll largely follow Horwich in that focus, although the distinction between rationalization of the deployment of norms of justification and explanation of their correctness will be relevant in *V* below. Also, I will sometimes use a phrase like “rationalize and explain the deployments of norms of justification” as a slight abbreviation for “rationalize our deployment and explain the correctness of our norms of justification”.

norms of justification are deployed out of a concern for the value of truth, and in precisely this sense, I want to say that he holds that truth is not an epistemic value. More explicitly, we can say that truth is an *epistemic value* if and only if it plays a role in the rationalization and explanation of the deployment of norms of justification. Derived in this way from Horwich's discussion, I think that it is clear that my notion of epistemic value marks a genuine category in Horwich's discussion. But as we shall see it also marks, at least in one sense, a genuine category in the realm of value.

How does Horwich argue against the intuitive idea that norms of justification are deployed out of a concern for the value of truth, and thus against the idea that truth is an epistemic value? The intuitive idea cannot be right, Horwich claims, because attempts to rationalize the deployment of basic norms of justification in terms of the value of truth are neither possible nor necessary (§7).

Rationalizing the deployment of basic norms of justification suffers from a problem of circularity. This problem of circularity is familiar from discussions of the prospects for justifying basic rules of inference. The problem is that any purported argument for a basic rule of inference – like Modus Ponens – will have to deploy that rule in reasoning (even if not as a premise), and in this sense will be circular (or *rule-circular*). If circularity abrogates rationalization, then it seems as though rationalizing the deployment of basic norms of justification is not possible.

Rationalizing the deployment of norms of justification also suffers from a subtler problem of redundancy. Horwich construes deploying norms of justification out of a concern for the value of truth as a kind of goal-directed activity. Rationalizing the deployment of norms of justification in terms of the value of truth will proceed, then, in the way that goal-directed activities are rationalized: first, by establishing the value of the goal (truth) itself, and then, second, by showing that engaging in that goal-directed activity (deploying our norms of justification) is likely to achieve that goal. But here is the problem. Suppose that one rationally determined that deploying certain norms of justification is likely to achieve the goal of truth. Then one could rationally believe that deploying certain norms of justification is likely to achieve the goal of truth. But, Horwich writes,

[g]iven the equivalence of “p” and the “The proposition *that p* is true”, it is hard to see any significant space between the rationality of our following a certain rule for acquiring beliefs and the rationality of our thinking that the beliefs we would acquire in following it will tend to be true. (§7)

The idea is elaborated in a footnote, where Horwich writes:

...if it is reasonable to believe that following the rule, ‘Believe that T’, will yield the truth, then it is reasonable to believe *that the belief that T is true*, but then (given the trivial truth schema) it is reasonable to believe *that T*; so it is reasonable to follow the rule that simply dictates having that belief. (§7, note 11)

Horwich's more general idea is that rationally determining that deploying certain norms of justification is likely to achieve the goal of truth *all by itself* rationalizes deploying those norms of justification for acquiring beliefs. Once it is rationally determined that deploying certain norms of justification is likely to lead to the truth, then “quite independently of whether or not true belief is valued – we must be justified in [deploying those norms]” (§7). But if that is right, then there is *no need* to invoke the value of truth in rationalizing the deployment of

norms of justification. Thus the premise concerning the value of truth seems to occur wholly redundantly in rationalizing the deployment of certain norms of justification.

So, according to Horwich's paradox of truth and epistemic value, rationalizing and explaining the deployment of norms of justification in terms of the value of truth is both circular and redundant, and is thus neither possible nor necessary. Horwich accepts the paradoxical conclusion and thereby is led to the idea that truth is *not* an epistemic value. Truth is not an epistemic value in the sense that the deployment of norms of justification is not rationalized or explained in a way that involves a concern for the value of truth.

#### IV

I'll be returning to and offering a different solution to this paradox in  $\checkmark$  below. But the paradox leads immediately to another question – a question about how it is that we, as Horwich puts it, “*manifest* our concern for truth” (§8). This is question for anyone who thinks that truth is a value, but it has a particular salience for Horwich's view, obliging him to show how we manifest our concern not only for truth but also for truth *as a moral value*. Horwich provides an intriguing answer to this question, but it is not one, I will argue, that can serve his overall purposes.

A straightforward proposal for answering the general question is that we manifest our concern for truth by “our careful adherence to...norms of justification” (§8). But Horwich's position on his paradox of truth and epistemic value prohibits him from accepting this idea. If one could manifest one's concern for the value of truth by deploying certain norms of justification, then it would seem that that must be because those deployments are somehow fundamentally linked to – *rationalized* by or *explained* by – a concern for the value of truth; but Horwich's view of his paradox of truth and epistemic value is exactly that there is no such fundamental linkage.<sup>5</sup> Instead, Horwich suggests, in deploying our norms of justification, we manifest a concern only for those norms themselves, and not for the value of truth (§8).

So then how do we manifest a concern for truth? Horwich's intriguing idea is that we manifest our concern for truth not in *merely* deploying our norms of justification, but instead “in the frequent and selectively scrupulous deployment of norms of justification” (§8). Remembering that VT says that it is desirable to believe what is true and only what is true, we can elaborate this as follows: the *frequent* deployment of norms of justification manifests our concern for believing *all* truths, and the *selectively scrupulous* deployment of norms of justification manifests our concern to believe *only* truths. In what follows, I focus on Horwich's claim that we manifest our concern to believe only what is true through, in another phrase of his, a “heightened scrupulousness” in the deployment of norms.<sup>6</sup>

Now, in order for Horwich's intriguing idea to serve his overall purposes, there are

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<sup>5</sup> Horwich also notes that we can imagine a group of people who deploy different norms of justification, even basic norms of justification, but are still committed to the value of truth. But then a concern for the value of truth will be “present to an equal degree, and equally revealed, by those who follow rules of evidence that are highly irrational from our point of view” (§8). I focus on the objection that connects up with Horwich's paradox of truth and epistemic value.

<sup>6</sup> Despite the fact that Horwich wants to preserve the desirability of believing only *and all* truths, it seems clear that it is the *only* claim that is of most interest; the avoidance of error seems far more important than the need to know all, including all the irrelevant, boring, tedious truths that there are. That is some justification for the focus on the heightened scrupulousness in, rather than on the frequent deployment of, norms of justification.

two questions that need to be answered. They are:

1. Exactly how is a heightened scrupulousness in the deployment of norms supposed to manifest a concern for the value of truth?
2. Exactly how is a heightened scrupulousness in the deployment of norms supposed to manifest a concern for a moral and not epistemic value?

In the remainder of this section, I want to consider whether Horwich's intriguing idea can serve his overall purposes. I will be arguing that it cannot.

Horwich suggests that a concern for the value of truth is manifested by a heightened scrupulousness in the deployment of norms, for example, when one takes extra care in forming beliefs that are of only theoretical, and not practical importance (§8). This follows up the idea, mentioned earlier, that "someone who seeks knowledge and understanding for their own sake displays a moral virtue" (§6). But how does this manifest a concern for the value of truth? Horwich's idea is that since there is a heightened scrupulousness in a matter of purely theoretical importance, the concern cannot be for anything instrumental, and thus must be a concern for truth for its own sake. But this answer is unsatisfactory, even from Horwich's point of view. For if the reasoning in the paradox of truth and epistemic value shows that we cannot manifest our concern for the value of truth by our deployment of norms justification, and at best can manifest a concern for the those norms of justification themselves (even if the following of which make it likely to achieve truth), then it is not clear what can be added by saying that these norms are being applied with a heightened scrupulousness in matters of purely theoretical importance. Why is a heightened scrupulousness in the deployment of norms in matters of purely theoretical importance not a manifestation simply of what is yet an even more pressing concern for those norms of justification (even if the following of which make it likely to achieve truth) rather than a concern for the value of truth? If the original reasoning in the paradox is compelling, why is it not compelling or applicable here?

To get clearer on what is going on here, we need to distinguish between a weaker and a stronger kind of heightened scrupulousness in the deployment of norms of justification, and ask for what they can manifest a concern. The weaker kind takes the authority of a norm for granted, and involves a heightened scrupulousness in the deployment of that authority wherever and whenever appropriate. This kind of heightened scrupulousness is a matter of taking extra care in sticking to the rules. Let us suppose that this kind of heightened scrupulousness can manifest a concern for a moral value, say because sticking to rules is a, or is of, moral value (or for whatever reason). Even still, this kind of heightened scrupulousness cannot manifest a concern for the value of truth where mere deployment cannot manifest a concern for the value of truth. Taking extra care in sticking to the rules manifests a concern for some value only if sticking to those rules itself manifests a concern for that value. For example, taking extra care in sticking to rules of race-blind admissions for professional schools manifests a concern for the value of fairness only if race-blind admissions for professional schools manifests a concern for fairness (presumably many advocates of affirmative action would disagree, and it is no consolation to them to know that the rules for race-blind admissions are being followed with extra care). The point is that this kind of heightened scrupulousness cannot manifest *original concern*, but only derivative concern. So this kind of heightened scrupulousness in the deployment of norms

cannot manifest our concern for the value of truth, where, as in Horwich's original reasoning for his paradox of truth and epistemic value, mere careful adherence to norms does not.

The stronger kind of heightened scrupulousness is more demanding, and more elusive. This kind of heightened scrupulousness is not a matter of sticking to rules. It is a matter of deploying norms of justification in such a way *that leaves the norms themselves as possible targets of criticism*.<sup>7</sup> This kind of heightened scrupulousness precisely does not take the authority of the norms for granted, but instead involves deploying them critically and reflectively. It involves measuring the basic norms of justification themselves against a more basic standard. But what can be more basic than the basic norms of justification? The key feature of this kind of heightened scrupulousness in the deployment of norms is that the deployment of basic norms of justification is *itself measured by the value of truth*. The critical reflective deployment of basic norms of justification is *the* practice that distinguishes the deployment of norms for their own sake from a deployment of norms for the sake for the value of truth. Heightened scrupulousness in the deployment of norms can manifest a concern for the value of truth where mere deployment cannot because in the kind of heightened scrupulousness involved in critical reflection the basic norms of justification are themselves measured against the value of truth.

A preliminary conclusion is thus that if a heightened scrupulousness in the deployment of norms is supposed to show a concern for the value of truth where the mere deployment of norms does not, the heightened scrupulousness must be a matter of deploying norms critically and reflectively. I will assume that the kind of heightened scrupulousness that Horwich is talking about is this critical reflective kind, and not merely that of taking extra care in sticking to the rules. Unless this is right, Horwich will not be able to answer the question of how it is that we manifest our concern for the value of truth given his reasoning in his paradox of truth and epistemic value, and thus will not be providing an answer to (1) above.

But that leaves question (2) at centre-stage: how does a heightened scrupulousness in the deployment of our norms of justification, in the sense of the critical reflective deployment of them, show our concern for a *moral* value?

Let us review how this question comes to occupy centre-stage. Recall that Horwich's paradox of truth and epistemic value aims to show that the rationalization and explanation of our norms of justification in terms of the value of the truth is neither possible nor necessary. This allows that when one deploys norms of justification, one manifests a concern *only* for those norms of justification and not for the value of truth. When the question arises of how it is that one *does* manifest a concern for the value of truth, for its "for-its-own-sake', (moral?) value?", Horwich tells us that "what really displays that concern is a heightened scrupulousness in certain special circumstances" (§8). I have argued, as a preliminary conclusion, that it is not a heightened scrupulousness in special kinds of circumstances but a certain special kind of heightened scrupulousness – the critical reflective deployment of norms – that can manifest concern for the value of truth where the mere deployment of norms itself cannot be understood to do so.

But if all of this is right, then it seems that Horwich's thinking involves the following ideas:

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<sup>7</sup> Exactly how this is supposed to work is I think a very subtle matter, and cannot for reasons of both space and competence, be entered into in any detail here. For some relevant discussion, see following note and Rattan (manuscript).

- a. in deploying norms of justification *without* a heightened scrupulousness, one is manifesting a concern for a value different from the value of truth. This follows from Horwich's paradoxical conclusion that truth is not an epistemic value.
- b. in deploying norms of justification *with* a heightened scrupulousness, one is manifesting a concern for a non-epistemic, moral value. This is the basis of Horwich's explication of the target thought.

But for these to be right, it seems that Horwich must be assuming something like

- c. deploying norms of justification without a heightened scrupulousness is a manifestation of concern for epistemic values (of which truth is not one), but deploying norms of justification with a heightened scrupulousness is a manifestation of a concern for moral values (of which truth is one).

And that brings us back to centre-stage: how does a heightened scrupulousness in the deployment of our norms of justification show our concern for a *moral* value?

*The answer is that it does not, or at least does not in a way that excludes the idea that truth is an epistemic value.* Horwich seems to think that in moving from deploying norms to deploying norms with a heightened scrupulousness, one crosses a line that distinguishes the epistemic from the moral. But that is not right. Our preliminary conclusion was that if the deployment of norms with a heightened scrupulousness is to manifest original concern for the value of truth, then the kind of heightened scrupulousness that is at issue must be that of the critical reflective deployment of norms. But the critical reflective deployment of norms is certainly a part of, and may be fundamental to, *epistemic* value. Any conception of epistemic value that leaves out the critical reflective deployment of norms fails to recognize rational phenomena in which critical reflection adds to the *epistemic* normative status of a thinker's attitudes – adds to that kind of evaluation of a thinker's attitudes in virtue of which she gains or improves knowledge. If the extent and perhaps nature of epistemic normativity includes a norm detailing the positive contribution critical reflection makes to the *epistemic* normative status of a thinker, then a heightened scrupulousness in the deployment of norms manifests a concern for an epistemic and not (or at least not only) a moral value.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Moreover, critical reflection seems fundamental to the *nature* of epistemic normativity in the sense that although a *system of attitudes* can conform to and improve relative to the standard set by certain norms, no epistemic *agent* could conform and improve without norms of critical reflection. For such conformity and improvement to be attributed to the agent, the conformity and improvement would seem to have to be the agent's doing, for example of *her revising her belief*; but this requires reflection, wherein one's attitudes together with some normative deficiency (or not) in them is appreciated, and taken as the rational basis for revision (or not). This kind of reflective conformity and improvement may be just a matter of sticking to the rules better, but if it is to be conformity and improvement with respect to standard set by the value or norm of truth, it must be a matter of *critical* reflection, wherein the authority of norms themselves may also be in question. In short, the suggestion is that without critical reflection, an account of epistemic normativity is in danger of losing not only a concern for the value of truth, but also for the idea that it is the attitudes of a *thinker* with a *point of view* that are normatively evaluable. (For related discussion, see Burge 1996; 1998; and Bilgrami 1998, 2006). If these ideas are on the right track they suggest (of course only programmatically at this point) that it is in critical reflection that both the self and the value of truth – both subjectivity and objectivity, as it were – are made manifest. Obviously, issues about the fundamentality of critical reflection to the nature of epistemic normativity and selfhood are difficult and contentious. I try to get by in the main text with some less difficult and contentious points about the proper extent, rather than the nature, of epistemic normativity.



## V

All of this suggests a different response to Horwich's paradox of truth and epistemic value, a response that I would like now briefly to sketch. I'll take up first the problem of redundancy, and then the issue of circularity.

The response to the problem of redundancy is implicit in what I have said so far. If a heightened scrupulousness in the deployment of norms in the sense of a critical reflective deployment of those norms manifests a concern for the value of truth, those deployments must somehow be fundamentally linked to – *rationalized* by or *explained* by – a concern for the value of truth; and this shows that the value of truth is not redundant. A concern for the value of truth rationalizes and explains the heightened scrupulousness in the deployment of norms in critical reflection. Of course, Horwich does not see this as a way of meeting the redundancy problem because he thinks the heightened scrupulousness in deployment manifests a moral value. But, as our preliminary conclusion shows, if the heightened scrupulousness is to manifest a concern for the value of truth, it will be the kind of heightened scrupulousness involved in critical reflection; but critical reflection is a fundamental aspect of epistemic normativity.

Let me turn now to circularity. As a reminder, the problem of circularity is that the rationalization of our deployment of norms of justification will itself have to deploy these norms of justification, and thus will be at least rule-circular. But making explicit the critical reflective deployment of norms motivates a more complex, yet more natural, perspective for understanding the rationalization and explanation of deploying basic norms. This perspective involves two ideas. First, it is plausible to think that our epistemic right to deploy basic norms of justification is itself not *justified*, but rather *entitled* in the sense of Burge (1993), in that we have an immediate right to deploy these norms in the absence of defeating reasons.<sup>9</sup> This does not imply that there is nothing to say about why we are entitled; but it is to put the focus on the *philosophical explanation*, rather than on *the justification* for, deploying the basic norm of justification.<sup>10</sup> But, and this is the second idea, even if we move our focus to entitlement rather than justification, there can be explicit challenges to the correctness of an entitlement, and if the entitlement is to be re-instated, these challenges need to be turned back. A fundamental asymmetry between *justificatory* and *critical* projects makes all the difference here. If one tries to *justify*, say, a basic rule of inference, one will deploy that basic rule of inference, and in so deploying the rule of inference for which justification is sought, one will invite the charge of circularity. This is Horwich's idea. But if one wants and tries to *criticize* a basic rule of inference, one is *free* to use that very basic rule of inference. If one thereby succeeds in criticizing the basic rule of inference, one's argument is not circular, but rather has the character, broadly speaking, of a *reductio*: the supposedly correct basic rule of inference is serving in an argument against its own correctness.

These points suggest a response to the problem posed by circularity in Horwich's paradox of truth and epistemic value. When it comes to our basic norms of justification, our deployment of them is entitled. These entitlements need some philosophical explanation,

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<sup>9</sup> In related terms, it is very plausible to think that we should be *dogmatic*, in roughly the sense of Pryor 2000, about the right to deploy basic norms of justification.

<sup>10</sup> Here some distinction between explanation and rationalization is relevant (see note 4 above). I have and will continue to focus on the issue of rationalization in this paper. For more on the issue of the explanation of entitlement, see Christopher Peacocke's taxonomy of "levels" at which the entitlement relation can be characterized, and especially, his description of the third level (Peacocke 2004: 64).

and a concern for the value of truth may very well enter here. But I want to focus on the issue of rationalization, not explanation. Entitlements to deploy basic norms can be challenged, and unlike attempts at justification, challenges are not undermined when the entitlement *being* challenged is *deployed in* the challenge. When entitlements are challenged, reinstating the entitlement requires turning back the challenge. Explaining what is involved in turning back challenges to the correctness of entitlements is a tricky and subtle matter. But I think that the key point is that challenges to entitlements can be turned back without running into the problem of circularity because the relevant challenges can be turned back without providing a *justification* for the basic norms of justification.<sup>11</sup> At one end of the spectrum, this is done by arguing that the challenge is internally inconsistent; at the other end, it is done by showing that the perspective of the challenge is inferior in the overall package of bullets bitten and advantages claimed than the perspective that accepts the entitlement. When all of this is made explicit, one can conjecture that a concern for the value of truth plays a role in explanation and rationalization. It plays a role, as just noted, in the philosophical explanation of entitlement. I have not focused on that. More importantly it plays a role in rationalizing the process wherein challenges to entitlements are entertained and turned back. It is no coincidence that this process is none other than heightened scrupulousness in the sense of critical reflection where norms are deployed in such a way that their authority is not taken for granted, and where they are themselves legitimate targets of criticism.

In short my suggestion for meeting the problem posed by circularity for the idea that truth is an epistemic value is that although it may be true that a concern for the value of truth cannot play a role in the *justification* of deployments of basic norms, just as Horwich contends, it can and does play a role in the *most significant epistemic dealings* that we do have with these deployments – in critical reflection.

## VI

I'm dubious whether all of this is consistent with taking a deflationary attitude to the nature of truth. I'll close with a brief critical discussion of Horwich's defence of the idea that recognizing the value of truth is consistent with a deflationary attitude to the nature of truth.

Horwich argues (§9) that the considerations that he adduces in favour of the idea that truth is a value show that skeptics about the value of truth like Rorty (1995) and Davidson (2000) are mistaken. Further, *pace* Rorty, Horwich claims (§10) that one can hold that truth is a norm or value without any "hint of metaphysical realism (or of a

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Pryor 2004, where Pryor argues that Moore's proof of the external world both exhibits a genuinely justification-producing structure and partially constitutes a satisfying philosophical response to the skeptic, even though it is not dialectically effective against the skeptic. Pryor writes:

Nowadays, it's commonly agreed that an adequate *philosophical response* to the skeptic need not be capable of rationally *persuading* the skeptic that the external world exists, or that we have justification to believe it exists. Nor need it be capable of persuading someone who's seized by skeptical doubts. What it *does* have to do is diagnose and explain the flaws in the skeptic's reasoning. It has to explain away the intuitions that the skeptic draws support from...That's *the business* of philosophy: to diagnose and criticize arguments like the skeptic's. (2004: 370)

Pryor's remarks and their focus on criticism as opposed to justification are congenial to the views I have expressed above, about how it is that challenges to entitlements are to be turned back. Also, if Pryor is right, we also get the nice result that philosophy is a business with a concern for the value of truth.

correspondence notion of truth)”; more specifically, one can hold to the idea that truth is a value or norm without moving beyond deflationary strictures. We

have no reason to think (with Michael Dummett, Crispin Wright, Bob Brandom, Hilary Putnam, and many others) that our concept of truth is *constitutionally* normative – i.e., that it can be defined or explained only in explicitly normative terms...On the contrary, the principle VT is pretty obviously one of those cases (of the sort emphasized by deflationists) where the concept of truth serves merely as a device of generalization. (§10)

Horwich’s idea is that we need the concept of truth only to mediate the connection between *particular* norms like

E      It is desirable that: one believe the proposition *that*  $e = mc^2$  just in case  $e = mc^2$

and VT. How is that done? The a priori equivalence

T      The proposition *that*  $e = mc^2$  is true «  $e = mc^2$

allows E to be re-written so as to allow univocal objectual generalization, as:

ET     It is desirable that: one believe the proposition *that*  $e = mc^2$  just in case the proposition *that*  $e = mc^2$  is true

And from here it is clear that ET is just an instance of the universal generalization

VT     (x) It is desirable that: one believe x just in case x is true

where ‘(x)’ is a universal quantifier ranging over propositions. Horwich concludes that deflationism is consistent with, and indeed positively encourages an acceptance of the idea that truth is a value.<sup>12</sup>

What is puzzling about Horwich’s defence of the consistency of the value of truth with deflationism is that it completely ignores the issue of *what kind of* value truth is, and thus ignores many of the fruitful distinctions and ways of thinking that he develops in his paper. Of course ‘puzzling’ and ‘ignore’ are tendentious, and Horwich would no doubt say that the issue of what kind of value truth is not ignored, but is instead deemed by him to be independent of the general issue of the consistency of the value of truth with deflationism. But, as I will now try to show, Horwich misses in his explicit reflections a key connection between the value of truth and deflationism that is nevertheless present, as if by some kind of philosophical instinct, in the overall drift of the paper.

I want to focus on the fact that Horwich’s discussion ignores the conclusion that he draws from his paradox of truth and epistemic value, namely that truth is not an epistemic value. I think that Horwich’s conclusion fulfills a need in a deflationary attitude to the nature of truth to resist the idea that truth is an epistemic value. I would like now to close this paper by explaining more explicitly the connection between deflationism and Horwich’s paradox of truth and epistemic value.

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Horwich’s discussion of Dummett in Horwich 2005: 106-116.

It has been long urged by Davidson (1990: note 20), and even longer by Dummett (1959: 7), that the problem with deflationary accounts of truth is that they fail to recognize the deep and tight interconnections between meaning and content, values or norms, and truth, as these connections are articulated in the theory of meaning and content. Horwich considers versions of these challenges to deflationism, but he considers them in attenuated forms, and not with their full force.<sup>13</sup> I've ground that axe before, but for now, my point is that the connecting link between the issue of the kind of value truth is and the viability of deflationism is the idea that the viability of deflationism depends upon rejecting the idea that truth is an epistemic value. Horwich recognizes, instinctively if not explicitly, trouble for deflationism *if* truth is an epistemic value. That is why it is so important for Horwich to resist the idea that truth is an epistemic value. I want to explain this idea in three steps.

First, I'm going to assume that norms or values are standards for thinkers' attitudes, with different kinds of values constituting standards for different attitudes or complexes of attitudes. I'm also going to assume that epistemic values are standards for belief, and that moral values are standards for some complex of attitudes that may involve belief, but that also involve other attitudes, of a more motivational character. I do not think that these assumptions are especially controversial. But to keep the discussion on track, I want just to assume these points. Then the upshot of the idea that truth is a moral and not epistemic value is that truth is not fundamentally a norm for belief, but instead a norm for the complex of attitudes targeted in moral evaluation. In this sense, 'epistemic value' marks a genuine category in the realm of value or norm: it describes a category of value that is supposed to constitute a standard for thinkers' belief, and not for some other attitude or complex of attitudes.<sup>14</sup>

Second, it is often held that something like the psychological attitude of belief, and its patterning, plays a fundamental role in the theory of meaning and content.<sup>15</sup> This is certainly the case for Horwich, whose preferred theory of meaning and content understands the meaning of an expression to be constituted by its basic use regularities, where the regularities in use are regularities in the patterning of the (sentential, not propositional) psychological attitude of *acceptance*.<sup>16</sup> I think that this general idea, of which Horwich's view is a specific example, is a familiar and prevalent one. More to the point, I think that some view

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<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of Davidson, see note 19 and the references therein; on Dummett see §10, and Horwich 2005: 106-116. For a more robust account of the relevant concerns, see Rattan 2004 and 2005.

<sup>14</sup> How can truth *not* constitute a standard for belief for Horwich given that he endorses VT? VT says that it is desirable to believe what is true and only what is true. But this does not, neither by my, nor, I think, by Horwich's lights, make truth a standard for belief. What would make truth a standard for belief by our lights is if the truth of VT were grounded in fundamental features of the nature of belief. More specifically, what would make truth a standard for belief is if the fact that is desirable to believe what is true and only what is true were grounded in features of belief like the feature that norms for belief are deployed out of concern for the value of truth. *That is, what would make truth a standard for belief is if the truth of VT were grounded in truth being an epistemic value.* But Horwich's paradox of truth and epistemic value is meant to show that precisely that this is not the case. This is why I have claimed that for Horwich truth is not a standard for belief, even though he accepts VT.

<sup>15</sup> I think that the most important attitude in the constitution of meaning is knowledge, or at least belief that aims at knowledge, rather than just belief or even rational belief. A detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. For related discussion, see Williamson 2004: §5.

<sup>16</sup> Horwich's most recent discussion of acceptance is in Horwich 2005: 32-49. Also see Boghossian 2003: 41ff. for some considerations in support of the idea that the concept of belief plays a special role in understanding the notion of content, and in particular the normativity of content.

broadly along these lines is also accepted by Davidson and Dummett as an account of the constitutive basis of meaning and content (see Rattan 2004 for detailed discussion).

The third step and final step involves drawing consequences from what we have just said about values or norms and meaning. If truth is a moral value, then truth is not a norm for the belief-like attitudes whose patterning plays an important role in the theory of meaning. It further follows, and this is the key point, that if truth is a moral value, then there will no longer be the deep and tight interconnections between content, values or norms, and truth of the kind that Davidson and Dummett are claiming. This is because the belief-like attitudes – like acceptance – whose patterning is theoretically important for the theory of meaning and content, are not the attitudes for which truth is a norm. This significantly loosens the connections between meaning and content and truth, and thus serves the deflationist aim of understanding truth *apart from* and not constitutively tied to meaning. This conclusion can be drawn on the assumption that truth is a moral value. *But if truth is an epistemic value*, then the attitude whose patterning plays an important role in the theory of meaning is the very attitude for which truth is a norm. And if this is the case, it will again begin to look like the deep interconnections that Davidson and Dummett insist on are back on the scene, for truth will be a norm for the very attitude whose patterning plays an important role in the theory of meaning. This will set up the deep interconnections between meaning or content, values or norms, and truth and that Davidson and Dummett take to confound deflationism.<sup>17</sup>

From a deflationary point of view, the instincts behind Horwich's discussions of the kind of value truth is, and especially against the idea that truth is an epistemic value, are spot on, for if I am right, the viability of deflationism depends on the rejection of the idea that truth is an epistemic value. But, unfortunately for deflationism, and again if I am right, truth *is* an epistemic value, and thus deflationism may well not be viable. If one thinks that, very broadly speaking, the problem with deflationism about truth is that it underestimates the rationalizing and explanatory importance of truth, then this final result should be a welcome corrective to our assessment of the value of truth.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Boghossian:

If our grasp of the notion of content were to somehow depend in a privileged and asymmetric way on our grasp of the concept of belief, then our only route to the notion of a contentful state would be through our grasp of a constitutively normative notion, and...that would be enough to substantiate the claim that content itself is normative. (2003: 40-41)

Boghossian's aim is to argue for the normativity of content. His strategy is to set up this conditional and then to argue that belief is a normative notion because attributions of belief cannot be understood without recognizing that the attributee is in a state of mind that has truth as a norm of correctness. The strategy depends, like the broad view that I have attributed to Davidson and Dummett, on construing truth as an epistemic value.

<sup>18</sup> An early draft of this paper was presented as a critical response to Paul Horwich's 'The Value of Truth' at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Epistemic Normativity Workshop, held March 31<sup>st</sup> – April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2006. Paul Boghossian, Matthew Chrisman, Natalie Gold, Peter Hanks, Nancy Lawrence, and Ram Neta offered comments, questions, and friendly encouragement on that occasion. Thanks to them all. Thanks as well to an anonymous referee at the *Journal of Philosophical Research* from whose close attention the paper has benefited. Finally, careful written comments from Paul Horwich and Christopher Peacocke helped to prevent errors, to sharpen key distinctions, and to clarify significantly the overall argument of the paper. A very special thanks to them both.

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